His Master's Voice

kidbrothers.net/release/sepoct94.html

If I loved my Master like my dog loves his, I would be more saintly than John the Divine ... more radical than John the Baptizer ... more deeply devoted than St. John of the Cross.

My dog, Bear, is a golden retriever with a more-than-weird fear of storms, an uncanny sense of how to be especially gentle around children, epilepsy, and a coat that is wildly wavy and shines gold. He has a look of nobility about him - a goofy kind of nobility - and at nine plus years of age, he still has not grown into his feet (except his head, which is somewhat enormous). He weighs about 75 pounds and eats very little to maintain that weight. He loves to fetch, especially in water. He hates baths and loves to roll in ... how should I say it? ... stuff that smells. He knows sit, down, heel, stay, but doesn't do tricks. I suspect that he is embarrassed for me that I try to show him off.

But the devout part - aside from his obvious charm - that is the part I most envy....

When a storm comes, Bear unashamedly dashes between my legs. If I lock them together, he attaches himself to whichever leg he is closest to. He does not run away in a storm - he runs to me. I don't know if this is about real safety or if it's about mere comfort, but I know that I would do better to crawl between my Master's legs in those times of storm, than to feign courage or break for another and doubtless inferior shelter.

Of all the things I've had to teach Bear, coming to me was never one. I've had to teach him not to sit on the couch, not to climb into my bed, not to sit under the table at dinner - but I've never had to teach him the reverse. When my friends sit with him, if he gets nervous or upset (and he doesn't much) they play an album of mine or give him one of my sweaters to nuzzle. Bear not only loves me, he loves my stuff like I should love God's "stuff" - His church, the Bible, stars, sparrows ... His voice, those things that carry His scent.

Bear takes his medicine (for his epilepsy) well, too. I've never been good at taking medicine. Bear obviously doesn't like it, but he doesn't resist - he's

only slightly uncooperative. And, if I try to sneak it to him in his food, he spits it out. If I give it to him from my hand, he swallows it. I try to avoid medicine from God - even to the point of avoiding God. Bear comes up quietly and sits and opens his mouth for it.

Of course, there is one time when Bear runs from me. It's when I practice the cello, and so, who could blame him - I'd run from me too, if I could. But Bear's master is not as good at playing cello as my Master is. Bear's master squeaks and squawks away at his instrument like my Master never will. I have long since given up the ambition to be as good at everything as my Master is - I do hope that my Master will not give up on making me as good at being mastered as is my dog.

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